INTRODUCTION AND BASICS

Mass Effect is a science-fiction role-playing action trilogy of games created by Bioware. It's available on different platforms such as PC, Xbox 360 and PS3. Origin, the platform used to download the game on PC, offers this summary of the game:

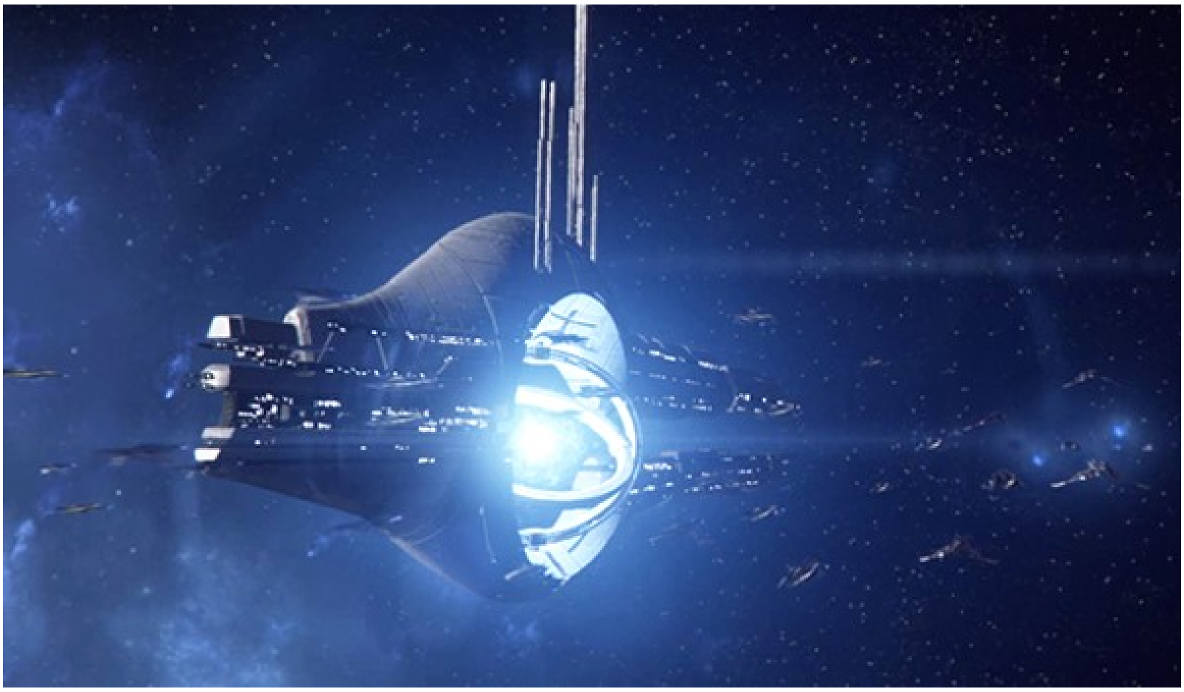
> *As Commander Shepard, rise to become the galaxy's most elite soldier and lead an all-out war to stop an ancient and ruthless enemy: the Reapers.*

Shepard is the protagonist of the game and the story is told from their perspective. We talk about Commander Shepard in details here.

Each Mass Effect game (ME1, ME2, ME3) has a specific storyline but the entire trilogy's plot has to do with the Reapers, the biggest enemy the galaxy has ever faced.

Why is it called Mass Effect? Because it happens in a universe where humanity discovers mass effect physics. It makes the creation of mass effect fields possible, which in turn makes a lot of key elements you find in science-fiction stories available: faster than light travel, artifical gravity, etc…

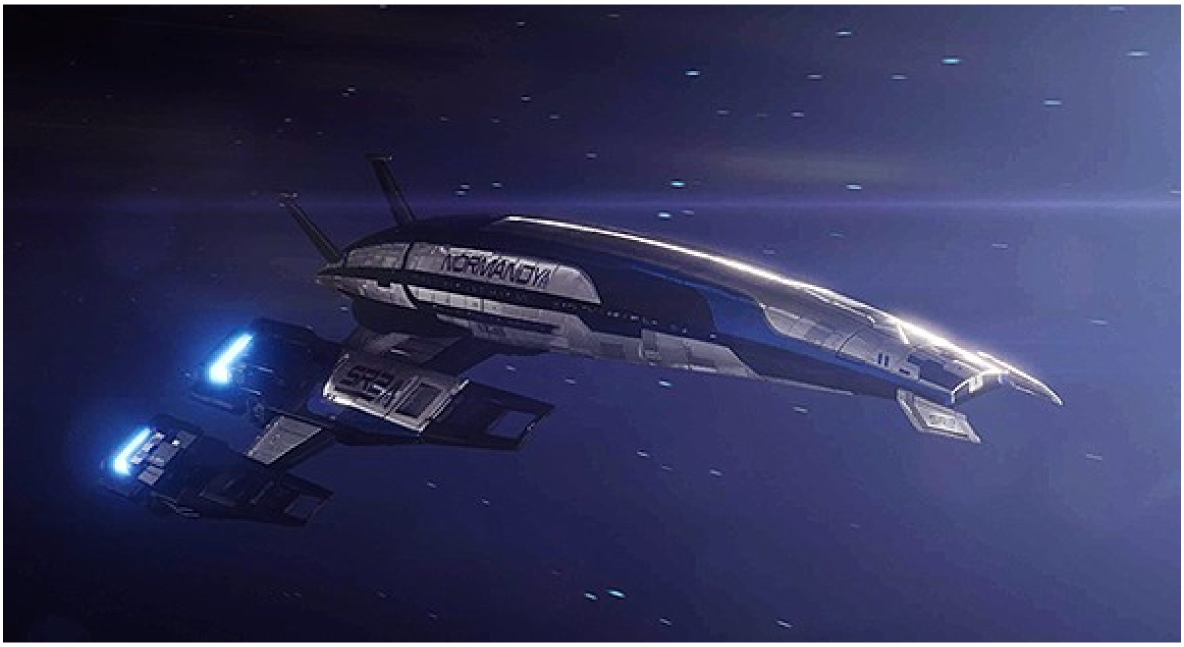
When the game starts, humanity is already capable of travelling through the galaxy. It does so using **mass relays** :



Mass Relays

A ship can go through a mass relay and reach a different system in a matter of seconds. That is how you travel in Mass Effect.

The ship in the game is called the **SSV Normandy**, here it is in all its beauty:



The Normandy SR-2

Note: There are two versions of the Normandy. This one is the *Normandy SR-2*. This is Shepard's home during the entire trilogy.

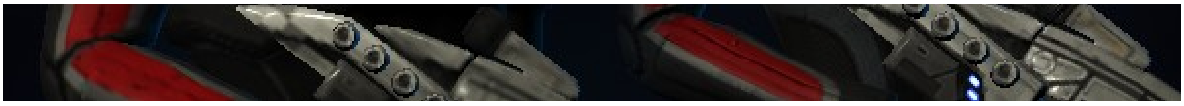
Now let's go back to **mass effect physics and mass effect fields**.

Without going into too many details, let's just say that mass effect fields are created with **element zero**. This element, subjected to electrical currents, releases dark energy. This energy is then used to create mass effect fields. Element zero is also what allows the existence of biotics in the Mass Effect Universe. Biotics can manipulate dark energy biologically.

Biotics in action

Those "powers" biotics have, Shepard can have them too! Or not. It all depends on your choice of a class. To see more about the classes available, check out our Shepard page.

Okay, but what does Shepard do exactly? Who are the Reapers?
Shepard is a member of the Alliance (representing humanity in space). They're an elite soldier.



Commander Shepard (Male and Female) – Default Face

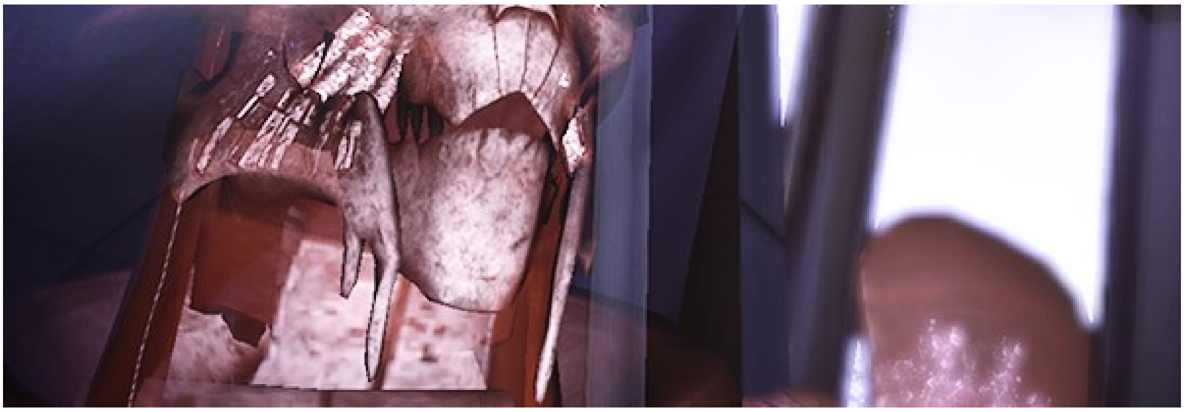
At the beginning of ME1, they're a candidate to become the first human Spectre. Spectres are agents serving the Citadel Council, the primary form of government in this galaxy. Check out our Galactic Community page to know more.

We're now going to introduce the basic plot of ME1:

Becoming a Spectre would be the highest honor, but first Shepard is to be followed and trained by another Spectre named Nihlus Kryik. Problem is: a human colony called Eden Prime gets attacked following the discovery of a prothean beacon.

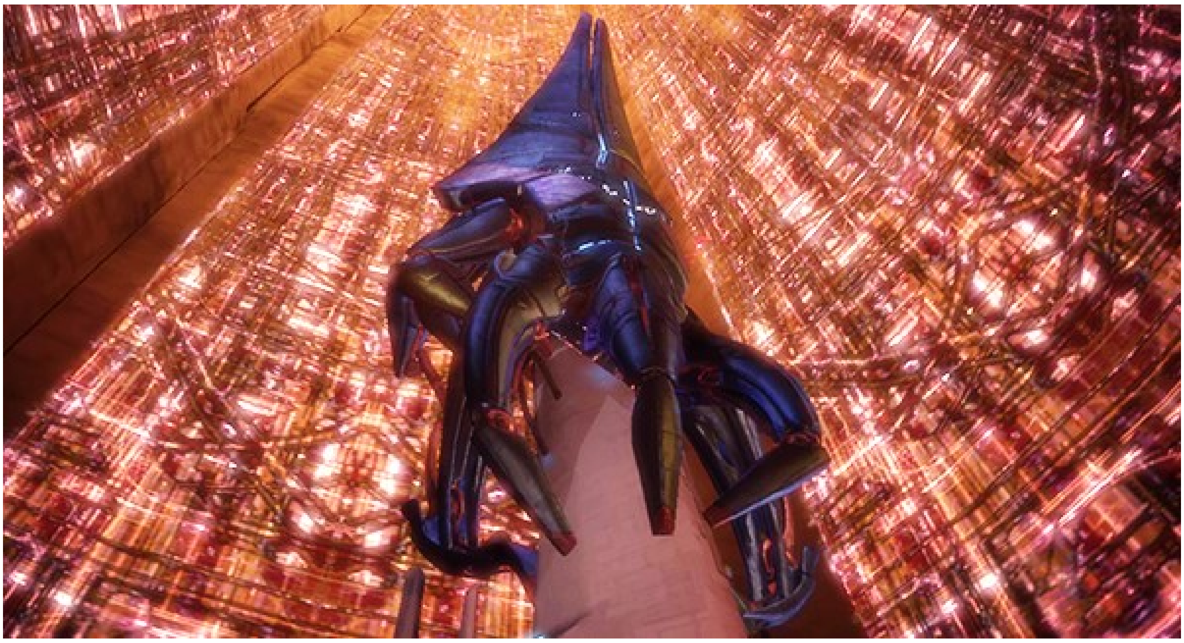
The Attack on Eden Prime

The Protheans are an extinct race, their technology is what allowed humanity to discover mass effect fields. Shepard and Nihlus go to Eden Prime to see what happened to the colony and get the beacon, only to discover that a Spectre named Saren Arterius is there first. He has gone rogue.



Saren Arterius

Saren is working with a Reaper named Sovereign. Reapers are a race of sentient machines who systematically destroy advanced organic life during what they call the “harvest.”
It happens in cycles, and Shepard’s cycle is coming to a close, meaning the Reapers threat is imminent and has to be stopped.
Shepard discovers most of this by getting images from the beacon.



Reaper

Since the mission on Eden Prime doesn’t go as planned, Shepard has to face the Citadel Council and explain what they saw. The Council is doubtful at first, but ends up naming Shepard the first human Spectre. On a mission to stop Saren and this Reaper threat, Shepard is given the SSV Normandy as their ship and is assigned a crew. Key members of the Normandy’s crew become Shepard’s squadmates (and friends).

Shepard & squad members Garrus Vakarian and Tali'Zorah

This mission to find Saren and stop him before it's too late is only the beginning of Shepard's adventures.

A new game in the Mass Effect franchise has been announced. You can find out more about it here.

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See the next page in our guide: The Mass Effect Games

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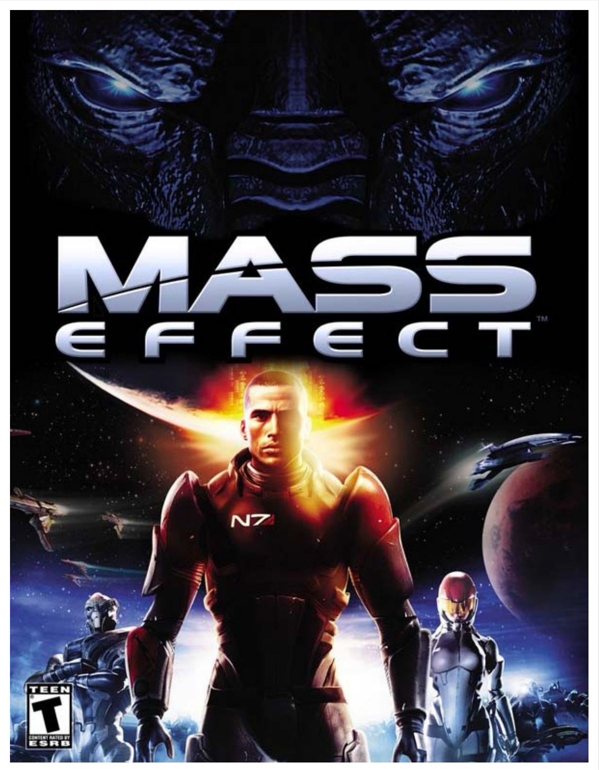
THE MASS EFFECT GAMES

The Mass Effect franchise started with a trilogy. We commonly call the games ME1, ME2 and ME3. This page contains a short summary of the games. If you want to know more about the events from the trilogy, we suggest looking at our Major Events page. We also have a Mass Effect Andromeda page if you're interested in this new Mass Effect game.

Mass Effect 1 (ME1)



Mass Effect 1

Release date: November 20, 2007 (US)

Humanity is slowly building itself a place in the galactic community. Shepard, an elite solider, is sent on a mission to a human colony to retrieve a newly-excavated Prothean beacon – an ancient artifact used to store information. Shepard is to be evaluated for possible Spectre training. Spectres are elite soldiers who only answer to the Citadel Council, leader of the galactic community.

However, Shepard finds the colony destroyed, the Spectre that was supposed to evaluate them dead, and after an accidental activation Shepard gets the content of the beacon in their head. The cause of this – a Spectre named Saren – soon gets proven guilty and goes rogue. To stop him, the Citadel Council (promotes Shepard to Spectre and sends them after Saren. However it is soon revealed that the threat is not what it seems. Saren is working for the Reapers, an ancient race of sentient starships that lurk on the outskirts of the galaxy. Every 50 000 years, they wipe all advanced organic life.

Shepard is on a race to save the galaxy and stop Saren before it's too late.

Mass Effect 2 (ME2)

MASS EFFECT 2
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE
BIOWARE
EA

Mass Effect 2

Release date: January 26th, 2010 (US)

Right after the events of Mass Effect 1, the Normandy's crew is sent to get rid of the remaining geth threat. During the mission, they're attacked by a then unknown force. The Normandy gets destroyed, part of its crew is killed, and Shepard themselves die. Two years later, they wake up on an operating table, brought back to life by an organization named Cerberus. It is revealed that human colonies are being kidnapped by the same force that destroyed the Normandy – the Collectors – and Shepard is tasked with stopping them. During the course of the game, they build an elite team capable of taking down the enemy.

Mass Effect 3 (ME3)

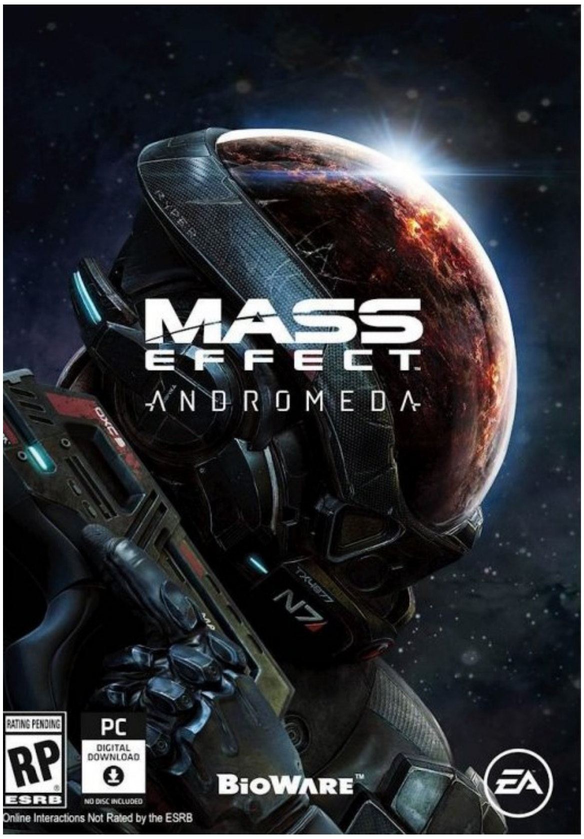
PAL
MASS 3
EFFECT
N7
15
BioWare
EA

Mass Effect 3

Release date: March 6, 2012

The story starts with the Reaper attack on Earth, where Shepard is held under a house arrest after their actions during Mass Effect 2. With help from Anderson, they make their way to the Normandy and escape the planet with orders to rally the galactic fleet and find a way to defeat the Reapers. The plot follows their efforts to make alliances and gather enough forces to take Earth back.

Mass Effect Andromeda (MEA)


MASS
EFFECT
ANDROMEDA
RATING PENDING
RP
ESRB
PC
DIGITAL DOWNLOAD
NO DISC INCLUDED
Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB
BIOWARE™
EA
N7

Mass Effect Andromeda

Release date: March 21, 2017

Mass Effect Andromeda is the upcoming fourth game in the Mass Effect franchise currently in development. It is set in the Helius Cluster in the Andromeda galaxy, and features a new protagonist character named Ryder, the human Pathfinder on a quest to find a new home for the people who travelled from the Milky Way. Andromeda features new species of aliens as well as those we know from Mass Effect.

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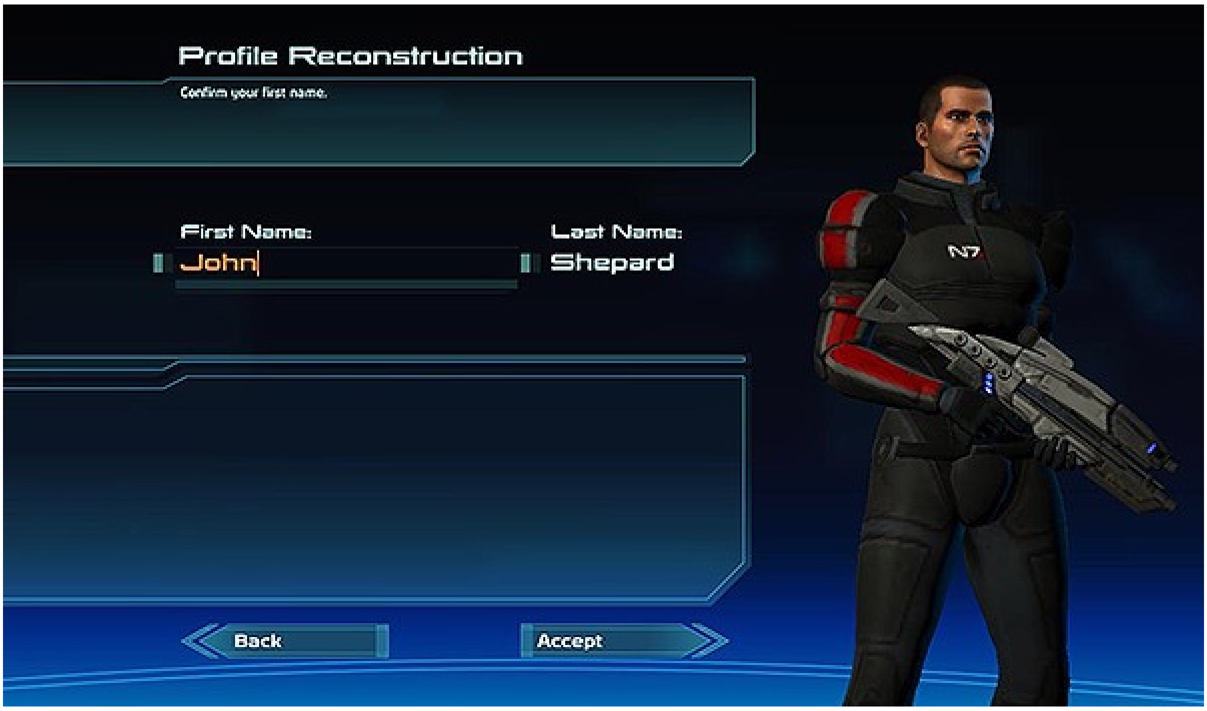
TRILOGY: COMMANDER SHEPARD

During Mass Effect, the player will assume the role of Commander Shepard, who is a fully customizable character from background, combat specialty, and appearance.

In Mass Effect 1, character customization happens immediately upon starting the game. Players are asked to reconstruct their profile as it has been corrupted. They may either then moved forward with creating their own Shepard or can simply choose to play as the default Shepard who is male, Earthborn, Sole Survivor, and a soldier class.



Profile Reconstruction

Confirm your first name.

First Name: John

Last Name: Shepard

Background:

If players proceed with character customization, Shepard can have one of three backgrounds (AKA: **Pre-Service History**), Earthborn, Spacer, and Colonist. The choice will effect some minor missions and interactions in all three games.

Earthborn Shepard: Orphaned at a young age, Shepard grew up in one of the large cities on Earth and ran with a gang called the Reds. Earthborn Shepards enlist with the Alliance when they turn 18.

Spacer Shepard: A child of the Alliance, Shepard's parents are both enlisted in the Alliance and move frequently. Spacer Shepards enlist with the Alliance when they turn 18.

Colonist Shepard: A child born on one of the many human colonies, Mindoir. At the age of 16 slavers attack the colony, killing all of Shepard's family and friends. Colonist Shepards are saved by the Alliance and later enlist at the age of 18.

Psychological Profile:

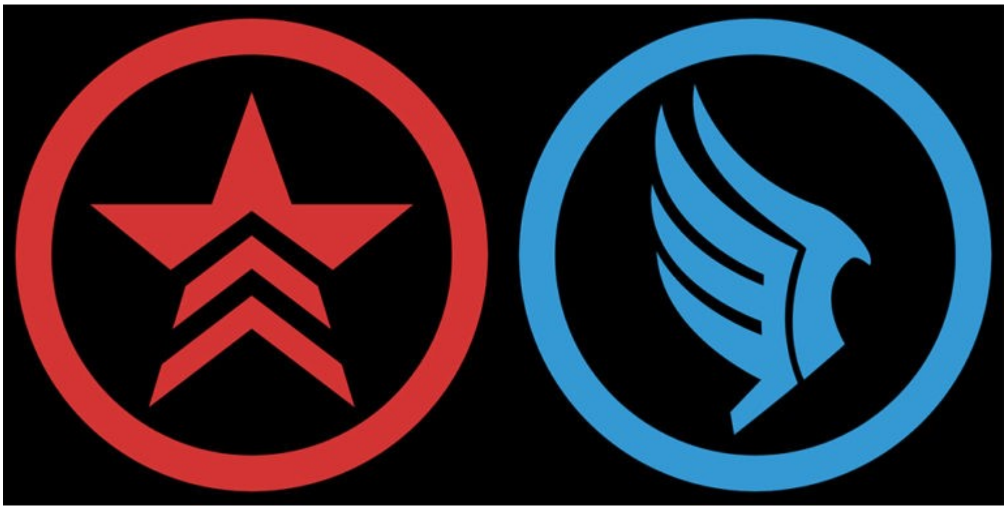
In addition to Shepard's area of birth and childhood, there are three additional choices for events that occur after enlistment with the Alliance, this choice is considered Shepard's **Psychological Profile**.

Sole Survivor: Shepard is the lone survivor of a Thresher Maw attack during their Alliance deployment. Their entire unit is killed on Akuze.

War Hero: Shepard single handedly saves a colony on Elysium from Batarian Slavers and is awarded the Star of Terra (the highest Alliance honor available) for their efforts.

Ruthless: Shepard sends a large part of their unit to their death to achieve a victory. In retaliation for the Skyllian Blitz, a Ruthless Shepard will join other Alliance forces by raiding Torfan, a Batarian colony. This earns them the nickname "The Butcher of Torfan".

Morality:



The player's Psychological Profile choice will directly effect Shepard's starting **Morality** at the beginning of the game. Morality in Mass Effect is defined as Paragon (blue) or Renegade (red) and will help/hinder the player's ability to successfully resolve certain issues. Morality in ME1 is also linked to the Charm and Intimidate (non-combat related) skills.

Sole Survivors will start with both Paragon and Renegade points.

War Heros will start with Paragon points.

Ruthess Shepards will start with Renegade points.

Paragon/Renegade choices will present themselves to players throughout the game and are also effected by how many points the players assign to Charm and

Intimidate in their skill tree. Paragon choices and options are often accompanied by compassionate and diplomatic dialog while Renegade choices are usually paired with a snarky or forceful dialog. Both sides of morality can help diffuse entire battles.

There are minute differences in the game if the player decides to run Paragon or Renegade. David Anderson will assign a specific mission once their Shepard receives an 80% allocation of either Paragon or Renegade points. The ending cutscene will also differ slightly.

It is possible for players to float between a Paragon or Renegade Shepard and this type of Shepard can be called a Paragade or Renegon, depending on the balance of their morality.

Classes:

Once the player makes their background and psychological profile choices, they will also choose their **Military Specialization**, or class. There are six classes to choose from. Each class can effect the player's style of combat drastically and will also effect the weapons they are able to use comfortably upon starting the game.

Three of the six classes feature biotic abilities. Biotics can either compliment weapons usage or be used in substitution for weapons if the player chooses.

Three of the six classes feature tech abilities. Tech specialists use their abilities to help reduce enemy defenses through a variety of methods.

Soldier Class (combat focused, no biotics, no tech)

~ Eventual access to heavy armor.
~ Initial access to combat armor and assault training talents.
~ Secondary access to first aid and fitness talents.
~ Eventual access to commando or shock trooper talents.
~ Access to pistols, assault rifles, shotguns, and sniper rifles.

Engineer Class (pure tech, no biotics, no combat)

~ Access to light armor only.
~ Initial access to decryption, electronics, and first aid talents.

~ Secondary access to basic armor, hacking, damping, and medicine talents.

~ Eventual access to medic or operative talents.

~ Access to pistols.

Adept Class (pure biotics, no tech, no combat)

~ Access to light armor only.

~ Initial access to basic armor, throw, warp, and barrier talents.

~ Secondary access to lift, singularity, and stasis.

~ Eventual access to bastion or nemesis talents.

~ Access to pistols only after basic armor is leveled up.

Infiltrator Class (mixture of tech and combat, no biotics)

~ Eventual access to medium armor.

~ Initial access to tactical armor, electronics, and decryption talents.

~ Secondary access to fitness and damping talents.

~ Eventual access to commando or operative talents.

~ Access to pistols and sniper rifles.

Sentinel Class (mixture of tech and biotics, no combat)

~ Access to light armor only.

~ Initial access to throw, barrier, decryption, and first aid talents.

~ Secondary access to lift, stasis, electronics, and medicine talents.

~ Eventual access to marksman, bastion or medic talents.

~ Access to pistols only.

Vanguard Class (mixture of biotics and combat, no tech)

~ Eventual access to medium armor.

~ Initial access to assault training, throw, and warp talents.

~ Secondary access to tactical armor, lift, and barrier talents.

~ Eventual access to shock trooper or nemesis talents.

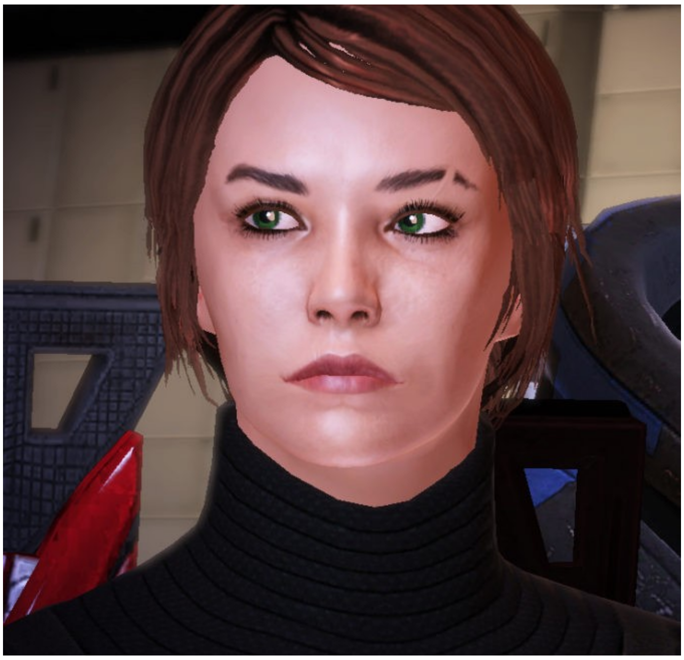
~ Access to pistols and shotguns.

Weapons note: Classes are strictly limited to specific weapon usage in Mass Effect 1. If the player has achieved the required number of kills in a non-class specific weapon (75 kills) in any play through, they may, after the Luna mission, unlock a bonus weapon or power that is not limited by class. If the required number of kills has not occurred prior to that mission, the bonus use of a non-class weapon may not be obtained. Shepard will carry all types of weapons throughout the game even if they are not proficient in their use.

Appearance:

Once players choose a class, they will move forward with the final step of character customization, **appearance**.

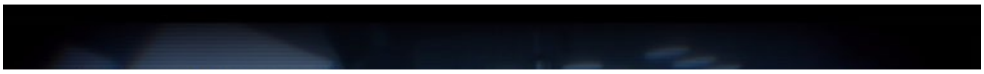
Players will choose either a male or female appearance for their Shepard, as well as facial structure, hair color, and eye color. Default male Shepard is modeled after Mark Vanderloo and is often nicknamed Sheploo due to this. Default female Shepard has no facial model, but is often called FreckleShep.



Female Shepard – Default Face in ME1

Once all details are confirmed, the player will see a cut scene with their chosen Shepard gazing out over a planet while a voice over conversation occurs between David Anderson and Donnel Udina. The two men discuss Shepard's background and Spectre eligibility. Play begins shortly after that.

Shepard in Mass Effect 2:



108
64
61
7.42
10.2
6.0

Lazarus Project

At the start of Mass Effect 2, players will be asked if they would like to import their Shepard from Mass Effect 1 or if they would like to start with a new Shepard.

If imported, all decisions made by the player's Mass Effect 1 Shepard will be applied to Mass Effect 2. If not, the player will be asked to answer a series of quick questions that will shape their story. These questions include the background choices and psychological profile choices available in ME1.

Shepards in ME2 will have similar, but not exactly the same class talents and powers as they have access to in ME1. Access to specific weaponry is also carried over from ME1.

Shepard in Mass Effect 3:

Male Shepard – Default Face in ME3

Once again, players may choose to import their Shepard from ME2 into Mass

Effect 3. ME2 Shepards will have the choices they made in the previous game(s) follow them into ME3, including decisions and actions taken for squad loyalty and the suicide mission from ME2.

If a new Shepard is started, another series of simple questions will be asked in order to shape the story in ME3. Newly created ME3 Shepards may find their story lacking additional characters due to the effects of the suicide mission and squad loyalty in ME2.

Shepards in ME3 will have class talents that closely match those experienced in ME2. ME3 is the only entry in the series where class choice does not limit weapon availability.

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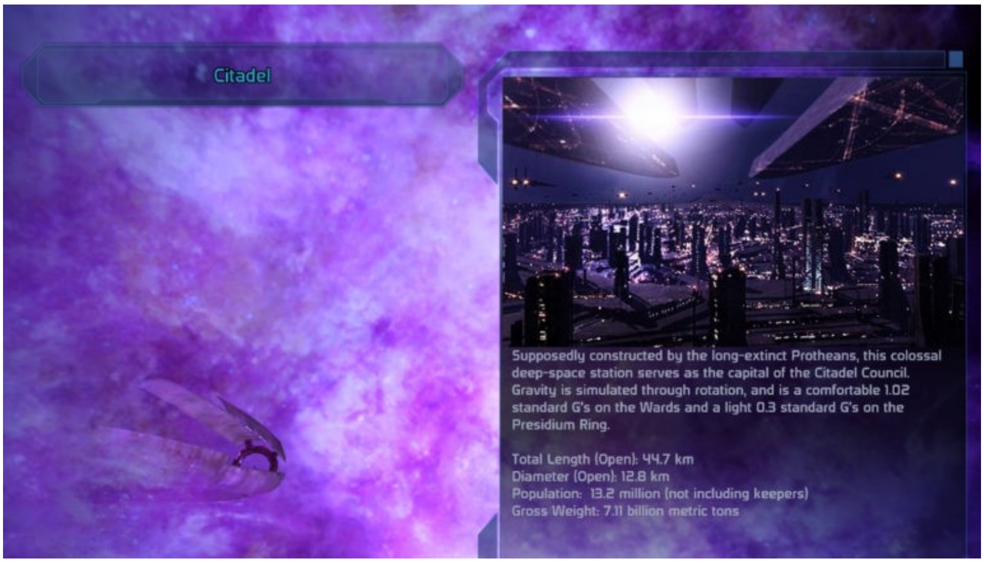
TRILOGY: THE GALACTIC COMMUNITY

The Citadel Council is the major executive commitee of the galaxy, which is why the unofficial term "Citadel space" is used for the species and planets who apply the Council law. Those who reject Council law can often be found in the Terminus Systems.
Only 1% of the galaxy is in Council space. The other parts have not been discovered yet.

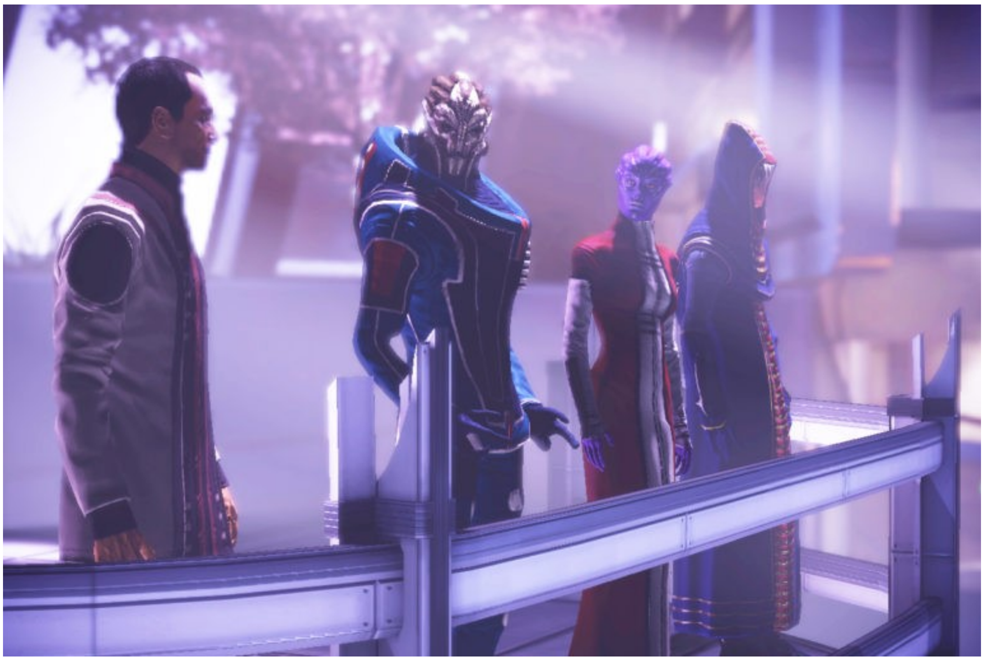


Supposedly constructed by the long-extinct Protheans, this colossal deep-space station serves as the capital of the Citadel Council. Gravity is simulated through rotation, and is a comfortable 1.02 standard G's on the Wards and a light 0.3 standard G's on the Presidium Ring.

Total Length (Open): 44.7 km
Diameter (Open): 12.8 km
Population: 13.2 million (not including keepers)
Gross Weight: 7.11 billion metric tons

The Citadel – As Seen in ME1

The Citadel Council has the highest power.



The Citadel Council in ME3

The Citadel Council is made of representatives from:

- **The Asari Republics:** the asari were the first to find the Citadel and are the most experienced of the race. Their history and culture heavily influenced Citadel politics. On their homeworld, Thessia, there are different Republics. The asari as a whole make the law with their " all-inclusive legislature", but the The Matriarch, the oldest asari, are their leaders and the ones who have the last say. The Matriarch are also the ones who execute the law and judge those who don't follow the law. The Justicar Order, made of Justicars, hunt down the biggest criminals in asari space. They're feared among all asari.
- **The Salarian Union:** the salarians reached the Citadel second. On their homeworld, Sur'Kesh, matrilineal bloodlines and political alliances formed through interbreeding determine who lead. Each area is ruled by a Dalatrass. The salarians have the Special Tasks Group, a group of elite agents who specialize in counterterrorism, infiltration reconnaissance, assassination, and sabotage. In general it's safe to say the most important families make the law, execute it and judge those who do not follow it.
- **The Turian Hierarchy:** the turians gained a seat on the Council following their role in ending the Krogan Rebellions. The turian government is ahierarchical meritocracy. The turians value civic duty and sense of responsability. They

have 27 citizenship tiers: civilians, military service and formal citizenship are the major steps. When a turian ascends to the last tier, they have a chance to become Primarch. Each Primarch rules over a colonization cluster. The Primarchs are the ones who vote on matters regarding national importance. The Turian Hierarchy makes sure the law is executed. Turians at every tier are usually the ones who judge those who don’t follow the law, with rehabilitation being possible. The turians don’t have a task force like the salarians or a specific order like the Justicars.

- **The System Alliances:** the humans gained a seat after helping defeating Saren, Sovereign and their geth army during ME1. The System Alliances is a supranational government representing humanity as a whole. The Alliance acts as governance and defense of all colonies and stations outside of the Solar System. Earth is having a golden age at the time ME1 starts, with technological advances and resources from different colonies. Earth is still made of nation-states

The Council’s decisions carry all over the galaxy, though they don’t have power over independent governments.
The Council strives for for compromise, cooperation and peace. The asari are usually the diplomats, the salarians are the espions, and the turians are the soldiers.

The **Spectres** (from the Office of Special Tactics and Reconnaissance) answer only to the Citadel Council.

Spectres

They're elite operatives who have the power and authority to deal with threats all over the galaxy. How they deal with those threats depend on their personality: some Spectres try to keep the peace, others are assassins.

The non-Council races are the hanar, volus, elcor, quarians, batarians, geth, drell, krogan, vorcha and keepers.

Some of those races are granted an ambassady in the Citadel and some are client races (the volus are a client race of the turians and the drell are a client race of the hanar).

We'll add more information about the different species very soon.

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See the next page in our guide: Major Events

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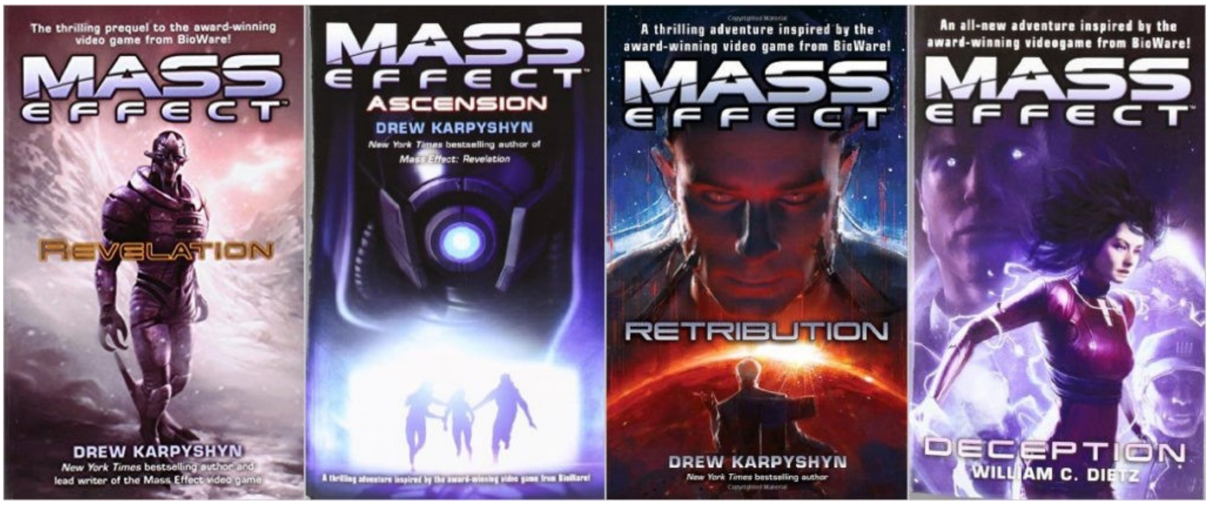
MASS EFFECT CANON

Here is our list of all Mass Effect canon with an explanation for each work. You can find a list of all Mass Effect canon works in chronological order here.
This page will contain more information soon.

Novels:


The thrilling prequel to the award-winning video game from BioWare!
MASS EFFECT
REVELATION
DREW KARPYSHYN
New York Times bestselling author and lead writer of the Mass Effect video game
MASS EFFECT
ASCENSION
DREW KARPYSHYN
New York Times bestselling author of Mass Effect: Revelation
A thrilling adventure inspired by the award-winning video game from BioWare!
A thrilling adventure inspired by the award-winning video game from BioWare!
MASS EFFECT
RETRIBUTION
DREW KARPYSHYN
New York Times bestselling author
An all-new adventure inspired by the award-winning videogame from BioWare!
MASS EFFECT
DECEPTION
WILLIAM C. DIETZ

- Mass Effect: Revelation

A prequel to Mass Effect, set in the year 2165. Its plot involves David Anderson and Saren Arterius investigating an attack on a human research station.

- Mass Effect: Ascension

Set a few months after the events of Mass Effect, and concerns a young biotic prodigy, Gillian Grayson, pursued by Cerberus. Grayson is aided by Kahlee Sanders, who also had a significant role in the previous novel.

- Mass Effect: Retribution

Set one year after the events of Mass Effect 2, and concerns Cerberus, and their investigation of Reaper technology. They start experimenting on Paul Grayson. Khalee Sanders and David Anderson team up to find and save him.

- Mass Effect: Deception

Set not long after the events of Mass Effect: Retribution, and follows Gillian Grayson's search for her father's murderer, the Illusive Man. Due to inconsistency with lore, this novel is not considered canon.

THE OFFICIAL PREQUEL TO THE EAGERLY AWAITED VIDEO GAME FROM
BIOWARE
MASS EFFECT
ANDROMEDA
NEXUS UPRISING
JASON M. HOUGH | K. C. ALEXANDER

- Mass Effect Andromeda: Nexus Uprising

Nexus Uprising tells the story of the Nexus' arrival in Andromeda one year before the arrival of Ark Hyperion. The Nexus collides with the Scourge, a space phenomenon that damages the station and kills the leaders of the Andromeda Initiative. New leaders are forced to take control, but it's not without issues.

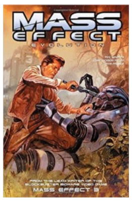
Comics:

MASS EFFECT

Mass Effect: Redemption (published by Dark Horse)

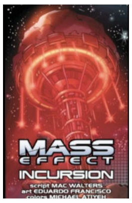
A four-issue comics following Liara T'soni leading up to the events of

Mass Effect 2 and related to the DLC "Lair of the Shadow Broker." Shepard's body is the source of many schemes. Liara tries to recover it before it falls into the wrong hands.


MASS EFFECT

Mass Effect: Evolution (published by Dark Horse)

A four issue comic that focuses on the origin of the Illusive Man, and is set during the First Contact War, shortly after the discovery of the Mass Relays.


MASS EFFECT
INCURSION
script MAC WALTERS
art EDUARDO FRANCISCO

Mass Effect: Incursion

An online comic (8 pages) that follows Aria T'Loak's encounter with the Collectors one week prior to the opening events of Mass Effect 2.

MASS EFFECT
INCURSION
INQUISITION

Mass Effect: Inquisition (available to read online here)

Taking place after Mass Effect 2, the plot follows Captain Armando-Owen Bailey during his investigation of Executor Venari Pallin and corruption within C-Sec.

Mass Effect: Conviction

Taking place before Mass Effect 3, the plot follows Lieutenant James Vega during his stay on Omega before returning to Systems Alliance service after the events of Paragon Lost. This is a free comic.

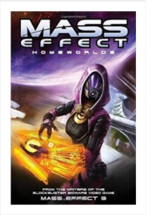
FREE COMIC BOOK DAY
MASS EFFECT

Mass Effect: He Who Laughs Best

A free comic taking place before before the events of Mass Effect 1. It follows Jeff "Joker" Moreau before he becomes the pilot of the SSV Normandy.

Mass Effect: Invasion (published by Dark Horse)

This comic follows Aria T'Loak, leader of the space station Omega, as she fight against a new threat unleashed on Omega by the terrorist organization Cerberus.



Mass Effect: Homeworlds (published by Dark Horse)

A four issue anthology series comics. Each comic follows a specific squadmate: James Vega, Tali'Zorah, Garrus Vakarian, and Liara T'Soni.

Blasto: Eternity is Forever (published by Dark Horse)

This comic tells the story of Blasto, a Hanar Spectre featured in several Mass Effect films as the galaxy's first Hanar Spectre.

Mass Effect: Foundation (published by Dark Horse)

A 13-issue anthology comic following various characters of the Mass Effect universe. The first issue Foundation #1 is available for free.

Mass Effect: Discovery (published by Dark Horse)

This comic follows a turian who tries to infiltrate the Andromeda Initiative.

Movie(s):

- Mass Effect: Paragon Lost

MASS
EFFECT
PARAGON LOST

Mass Effect: Paragon Lost

James Vega, a squadmate in Mass Effect 3, is the hero of this Mass Effect anime movie. He leads a Special Forces squad on a human colony that ends up being attacked by a new enemy: the Collectors. Vega and his squad need to work together in order to defeat them. The events of the film happen before Mass Effect 2, and are referred to by James Vega himself in a Mass Effect 3 scene.

Mobile Games:

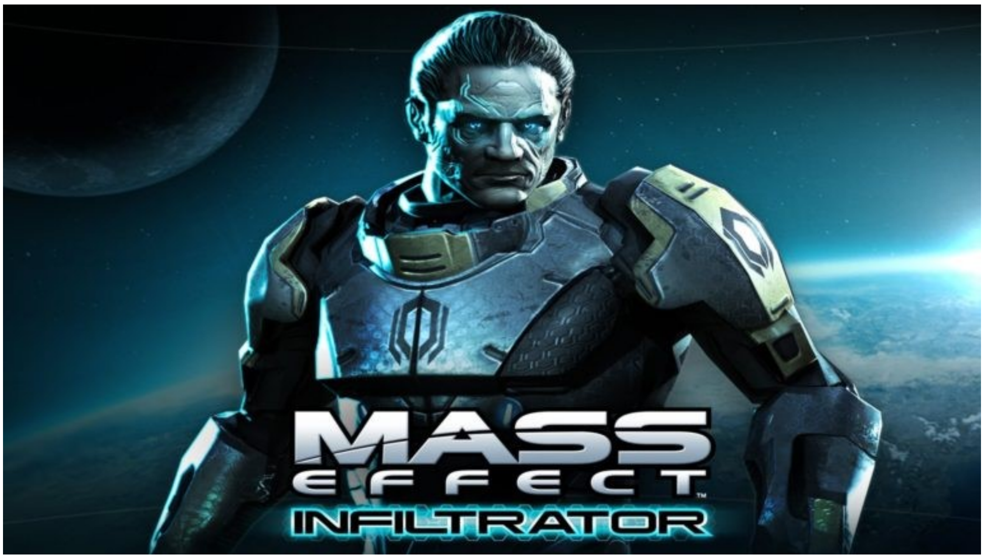
- Mass Effect Galaxy

MASS
EFFECT
GALAXY

Mass Effect Galaxy

This shooter game was made available to iOS devices on June 2009. It takes place before the events of Mass Effect 1. Players can take on the role of Jacob Taylor, a squadmate from Mass Effect 2, as he fights batarian terrorists. Jacob is not yet a Cerberus agent at the time of the game.

- Mass Effect Infiltrator



Mass Effect Infiltrator

This shooter game was made available to iOS devices on March 2012. It is no longer in the App Store. The game is set during Mass Effect 3 and follows Randall Ezno, a Cerberus agent, who ends up turning against the organization.

Return to the Mass Effect Guide

See the next page in our guide: Mass Effect 3 Multiplayer

MASS EFFECT LORE

The Hanar Language

Khelish: The Quarian Language

The Elcor Language: a Symphony in One Sneeze

Translators 101

A very happy new year from MEL!

Mass Effect Andromeda Transcript : Nexus Reunion

Mass Effect Andromeda Transcript: Planetside

Mass Effect Andromeda Transcript

Trilogy Lore: Publishing the Table of Contents

Mass Effect Transcript Published

CONTACT

info@masseffectlore.com

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ABOUT

Welcome to Mass Effect Lore (M.E.L. for short), a Mass Effect fansite.

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MAJOR EVENTS

Mass Effect is full of rich and fascinating events, and we're going to take a close look at them. Our sources are the official Mass Effect timeline and the timeline given in the games and found in the Mass Effect Wiki.

The official Mass Effect timeline starts at the year 2069, and can often be quite contradictory with the timeline given in the games. We'll explore this in details soon.

The timeline is divided in two:

- BCE: before our Common Era (before year 0)
- CE: our Common Era (after year 0)

Before our Common Era, we have four major time periods:

- Prehistoric Time (Unknown to 1,000,000,000 BCE)
- Pre-Prothean Times (1,000,000,000 BCE – 68,000 BCE)
- Pre-Council Times (68,000 BCE – 500 BCE)
- Council Era – Formation (500 BCE – 1 CE)

Our Common Era starts with the Council Era and also has four major time periods

:

- Council Era – War and Rebellion (1 CE – 900 CE)
- Council Era – Expansion (900 CE – 2157 CE)
- Council Era – Advent of Humanity (2157 CE – 2183 CE)
- Mass Effect (2183 CE – 2186 CE)

Events established at the start of the game:

In **2147 CE**, traces of element zero are found on Mars. Element zero allows the existence of mass effect fields and biotics (link to introduction)

In **2148**, humanity discovers a cache of hidden Prothean technology on Mars. The Protheans are an extinct race who mastered mass effect fields. As explained in our introduction, it allows faster than light travel and space exploration. By analyzing this technology, humanity discovers in **2149** that Charon (Pluto's moon) is actually a mass relay.

At the time, they still don't know that there is a network of relays across the galaxy. They later discover it with a first expedition through Charon, led by Jon Grissom of the Systems Alliance. The Systems Alliance is born out of the need to unite humans in this space exploration. The Alliance's charter is signed by the biggest nations on Earth and still represents humanity in the galaxy when Mass Effect 1 starts.

In **2151**, the Alliance starts the construction of a massive space station at Arcturus. It will become the Alliance headquarters.

That same year, an accident at the Singapore International Spaceport exposes humans to element zero in dust form. 30% of the children born after that element zero exposure have cancerous growths. Some of those children, however, will become biotics.

In **2152**, humans start to colonize the first colonies outside of the local solar system.

In **2154,** our hero Shepard is born. The same year, there is a second accident exposing more humans to element zero.

In **2156**, a small number of the children exposed to element zero start to exhibit telekinetic abilities.

In **2157**, a new period starts with the First Contact War, when humanity finally makes contact with another race.

Contact War from Mass Effect: Evolution

The turians see humans trying to activate dormant mass relays, which is forbidden by galactic law, so they attack humanity. The war lasts three months. During that time, turians occupy Shanxi, a human colony. Humanity evicts them from the planet one month later.

Both species began preparing a full scale war until the Citadel Council intervened to broker peace between the humans and the turians.

Humans discover the full galactic community and its different species.

In **2183**, the events of Mass Effect 1 happen. At the time, humans have reconciled with turians, leading them to work on a new spaceship: the Normandy. Humanity is trying to get a place on the Citadel Council and want a human Spectre. Spectres are elite agents who only answer to the Citadel Council. Shepard is the candidate chosen, and is sent on a mission with a turian Spectre called Nihlus Kryik.

Nihlus is supposed to judge Shepard and see if they're worth of the title… But nothing goes as planned. Eden Prime, a human colony, is attacked by a synthetic species called the geth and a rogue Spectre named Saren Arterius. Saren is working with a Reaper named Sovereign. The colony almost gets destroyed. Saren kills Nihlus…and Shepard receives visions from a Prothean beacon. Saren is exposed as a traitor and the Citadel Council decides to name Shepard the first human Spectre. Their mission: pursue and stop Saren.

Shepard becomes a Spectre

We learn that Saren is looking for the Conduit, which would allow all the Reapers to return to the galaxy and start a new cycle of harvesting where they destroy advanced organic species.

Are you following so far? We hope so, because it's time to pause and rewind.

We're talking a lot about humanity, Citadel Council, and Reapers.

We see in our Galactic Community part of the guide how the galaxy is run and which species are a part of it. Let's see how this came to be.

How was the Council created and what difficulties did it face before the first Mass Effect game?

The Citadel is the hub and capital of the current galactic government. The

Council, at the time of ME1, is made of three species: asari, turians and salarians.

The Council in ME1

The asari were the first to find the Citadel. They did so in **580 BCE.** Sixty years later, the salarians joined them.

The Protheans are the reason the asari were able to explore the mass relay network and discover the Citadel.

The Citadel Council is founded in **500 BCE** with asari and salarians at the helm. That year is also the **year 0 of Galactic Standard**.

The asari and salarians make contact with the volus. As the volus are great at dealing with economics, they are commissioned by the Council to draw up the Unified Banking Act. A common currency, named the credit, is established and is now found in all galactic economies.

Despite the volus's deep influence, they are not granted a seat but rather an embassy in the Citadel. When contact is made with the elcor, batarians, hanar and quarians, they are granted an embassy as well.

The turians, who will later have a seat, are busy with their Unification War. The turian colonies war against the Turian Hierarchy, which in the end, manages to pacify them.

From 1CE to 300CE, the Rachni Wars happen. The rachni are smart hive-minded insects. A Citadel expedition discovers their existence by opening a dormant mass relay that leads to their star systems. This explains, in part, why opening dormant mass relays is forbidden and why the turians attacked the humans when they did so years later. Indeed, the rachni begin a war with the galactic community. In 80 CE, the salarians find the krogan and uplift them.

The krogan and their homeworld Tuchanka are barely out of a nuclear age (from **1900 BCE**). They formed clans that are at war with each other. The salarians made krogan a spacefaring species, and used them as soldiers against the Rachni. It proved to be successful, as krogan were able to survive in rachni worlds and destroy the rachni in their nests. They killed the queens and eggs.

In 300CE, the rachni are extinct. The Council are grateful toward the krogan and reward them with several habitable planets as well as the conquered rachni planets. The krogan grow in numbers, and with their new ability to space travel, they start colonizing new worlds.

In **700CE,** the Krogan Rebellions start. The krogan start to annex worlds that were already colonized by other races. The Council asks the krogan to leave an asari colony called Lusia. The krogan refuse. The Spectres, created seven years before in **693CE**, are asked to strike krogan infrastructures. This act starts the Krogan Rebellions.

The Council makes first contact with the turians to ask for their help in this war. The turians agree, eager to stop the threat posed by the krogans' weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the turians become a part of the galactic community, and later take the volus as a client race.

In **710CE**, the turians use a salarian-engineered bio-weapon known as the genophage on the krogan. This bio-weapon makes most krogan pregnancies unviable, causing many stillbirths. As a result of this action, the krogan population declines. In **800CE**, the Krogan Rebellions officially end. In **900CE**, the turians are granted a seat for their part in ending the Krogan Rebellions.

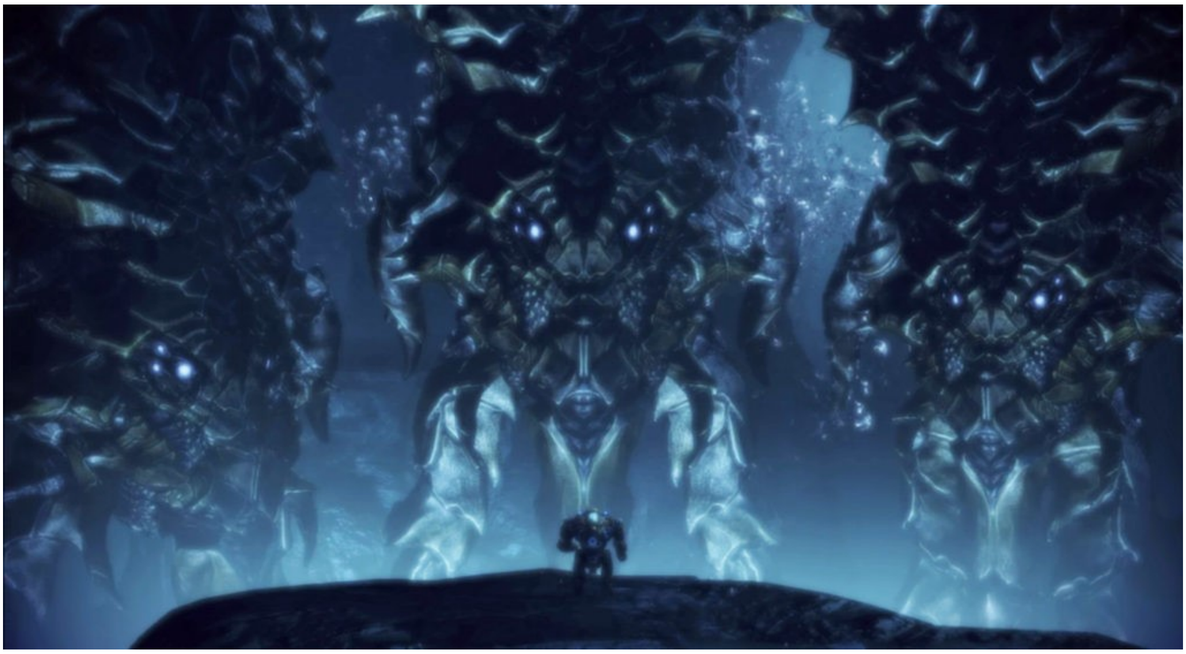
The three Council races are now united.

In **2183CE**, the events of Mass Effect happen. Depending on the choice Shepard makes, the members of the Citadel Council can either be saved or killed. If the Council dies, they are replaced by new asari, salarian, and turian members by the second game, but may be either entirely human or led by a human in the interim.

Let's go even further back, before the asari find the Citadel. Who are the Protheans? How did the Reapers become such a threat and how were they created?

This part will definitely spoil you, as the information within is from the end of Mass Effect 3 and/or its DLC Leviathan and From Ashes.

In Prehistoric Times, at an unspecified date, the Leviathans rule the galaxy. They enthrall species they encounter, protecting them as long as they are given tribute.



Leviathans

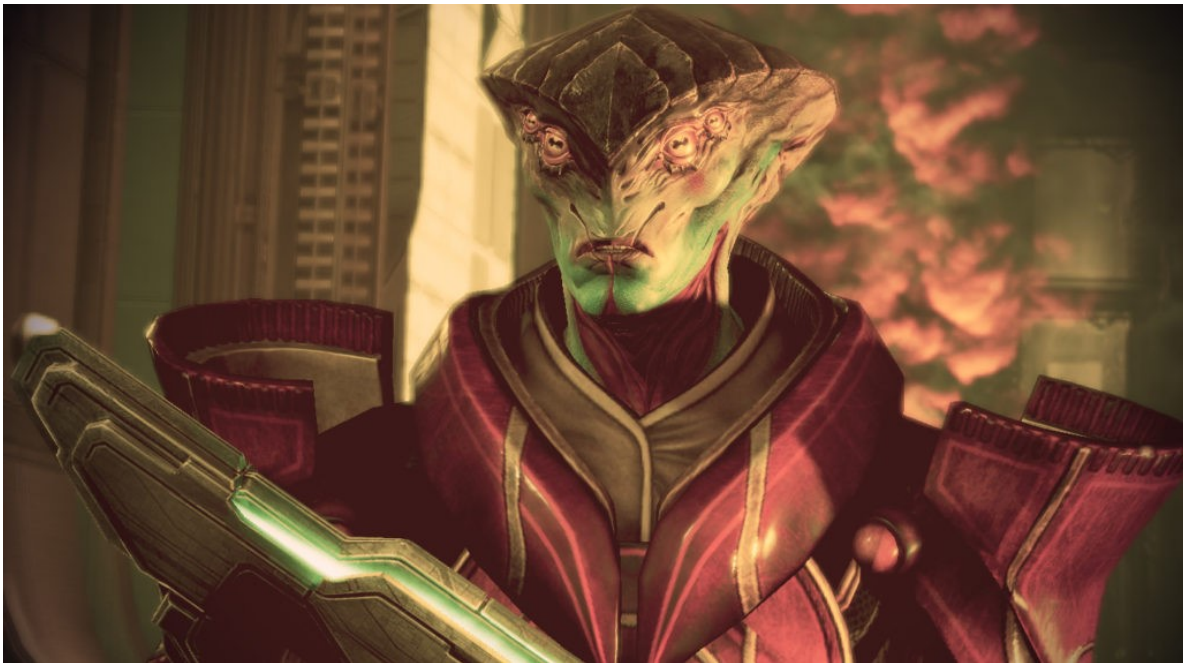
After observing that most races create synthetics that end up rebelling against them, the Leviathans create an Intelligence (known as the Catalyst) who has one purpose: preserve organic life. The Intelligence starts doing research on genetic material using pawns. With those pawns, the Intelligence turns against the Leviathans and kills most of them to create the first Reaper, named Harbinger. The Intelligence uses Harbinger to harvest space-faring organic life at the highest point of their evolution, so no conflict between organic and synthetics can escalate, and they create more Reapers. The cycles of regular harvesting begin.

Most species believed that the Protheans created the network of mass relays and the Citadel. Shepard later discovers that the Intelligence used the Reapers to create the network as a way to facilitate travels for the harvest.

In **68 000 BCE**, the Protheans are now a spacefaring species. They discover mass effect technology from the ruins of an extinct race called the inusannon. The Citadel becomes their capital and they establish themselves all over the galaxy using mass relays. They assimilate other organic races.

The Prothean Empire later collapses in **48 000 BCE**: the Reapers arrived through the Citadel and started to destroy the Protheans planet by planet. Since they had access to all data regarding the Prothean Empire, they could effectively find every planet and every civilization under their Empire. They isolated the Protheans from each other by getting access to the mass relay network. The most primitive of the subjects in the Prothean Empire were left alive, so the cycle could begin anew. Everyone else was wiped out.

Several centuries later, the cycle ends and the Protheans are now extinct. Only one Prothean remains: a Prothean named Javik, who is awakened by Shepard in Mass Effect 3.



Javik

In **2183CE** (Mass Effect), it is discovered that one Prothean world was spared: Ilos. On Ilos was a Prothean research lab, with its staff in cryogenic stasis to be awakened by a VI called Vigil once the Reapers were gone. Unfortunately, it was centuries before the Reapers departed. As a result, Vigil had to preserve power by cutting the power of non-essential staff's cryo pods.

A dozen Protheans were awoken by Vigil. They left beacons on other planets hoping to find more survivors. These beacons warned against the Reapers and described Ilos. (One of these beacons would later be found by Shepard.)

The Prothean scientists came to a conclusion: it was too late to spare the Protheans but they could still warn and help the remaining species and future civilizations. They first needed to understand where the Reapers came from. They found out that the keepers, a mysterious race doing maintenance on the Citadel, receive a signal from the Reapers that compels them to activate the Citadel relay, which would let the Reapers through. The Protheans needed to interfere with that signal, so the Reapers wouldn't be able to use the Citadel relay next time.

To do that, they needed to go back to the Citadel. They used the Conduit, a miniature mass relay prototype built on Ilos and linked to the "Relay Monument" (wrongly believed to be a statue) that lies in plain sight in the Citadel. The Conduit is not linked to other relays. It's entirely independent, and can be used in one direction only, meaning that the Protheans scientists could go to the Citadel, but could not leave it once there.

Despite the unavoidable risks and consequences of such a trip, the remaining Protheans traveled to the Citadel and interfered with the Reapers' signal. Their sacrifice meant that the next time the Reapers would send the signal to begin a new cycle, they wouldn't be able to use the Citadel relay and would be stuck in dark space.

Vigil believes that the remaining Protheans starved to death and died in the Citadel.

The events of Mass Effect 1

Since the Protheans interfered with the signal, the Reapers needed a way to reach the Citadel and changed the signal. Sovereign, the enemy Reaper in Mass Effect 1, becomes allies with Saren. They go to Eden Prime with a geth army, as some of the geth see the Reapers as a superior race, calling them "the old

Machines".

On Eden Prime, Saren activates the beacon before planting bombs. Shepard disarms them and reaches the beacon. It gives them warnings regarding the Reapers.

Eden Prime – the beacon

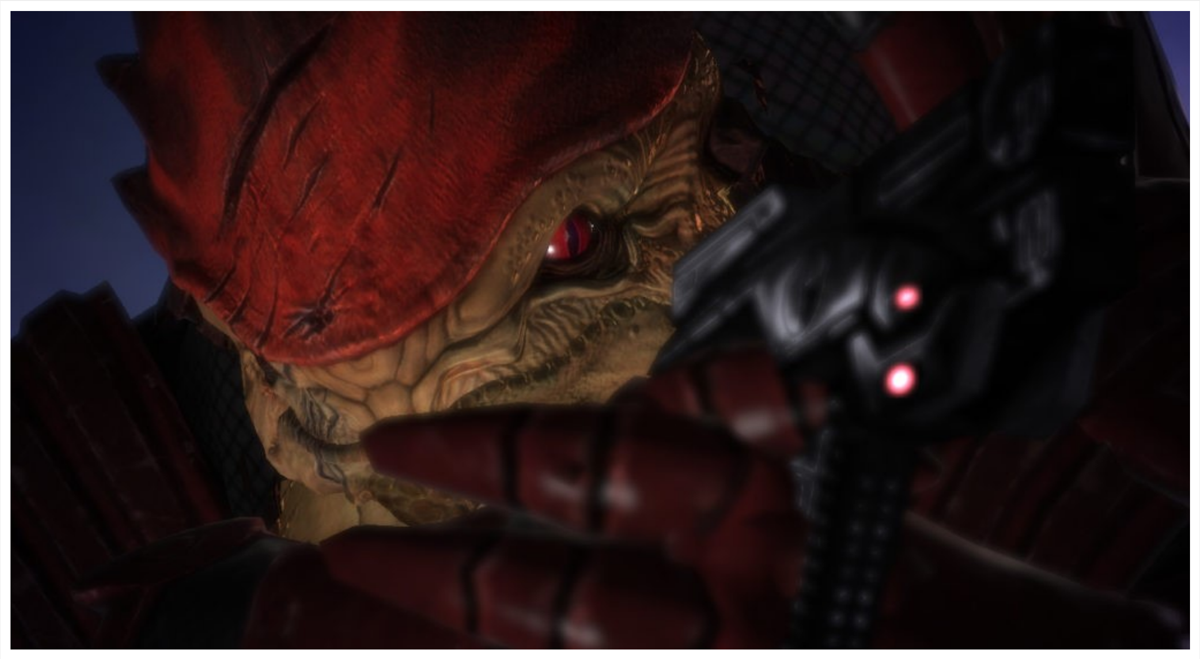
At the time, Shepard is an N7 soldier and a candidate to become the first human Spectre to be trained by Nihlus Kryik. However, Saren kills Nihlus and Shepard has to prove to the Citadel Council that Saren has gone rogue. It isn't easy at first: the Council doesn't believe Shepard. Tali'Zorah, a quarian squadmate in all three games, gives Shepard a recording of Saren and an asari Matriarch named Benezia where the two discuss the Reaper and the Conduit, the proof needed to convince the Council.

The Council listens to it and revokes Saren's Spectre status. They name Shepard the first human Spectre and sends them on a mission to stop Saren. The *Normandy* becomes Shepard's ship.

Shepard starts doing missions with their squadmates: a turian named Garrus Vakarian, a krogan named Urdnot Wrex, a human soldier named Ashley Williams, another human soldier named Kaidan Alenko, a quarian named Tali'Zorah, and Matriarch Benezia's daughter Liara T'Soni, an asari researcher specializing in the Protheans. Their pilot on the Normandy is a human named Jeff "Joker" Moreau.

On a colony named Feros, Shepard discovers that Sovereign is able to enthrall and control others in a process called indoctrination, which happens after a period of exposure to Reapers or Reapers artifacts. On a world called Noveria, Shepard fights and defeat Benezia, who then confirms that both she and Saren are indoctrinated. Benezia dies as a result of the fight.

Afterwards, Shepard is sent to a world called Virmire where Saren's main base has been found by a salarian infiltration unit led by Major Kirrahe. Saren has found a cure for the genophage and plans to use it to create a krogan army.



Urdnot Wrex on Virmire

Urdnot Wrex, Shepard's squadmate, gets upset about the news that Shepard might destroy the cure to prevent Saren from getting an army. A fight occurs, with different outcomes possible: the fight ends with Wrex killed (either by Shepard or Ashley Williams) or Shepard finds a way to pacify the situation.

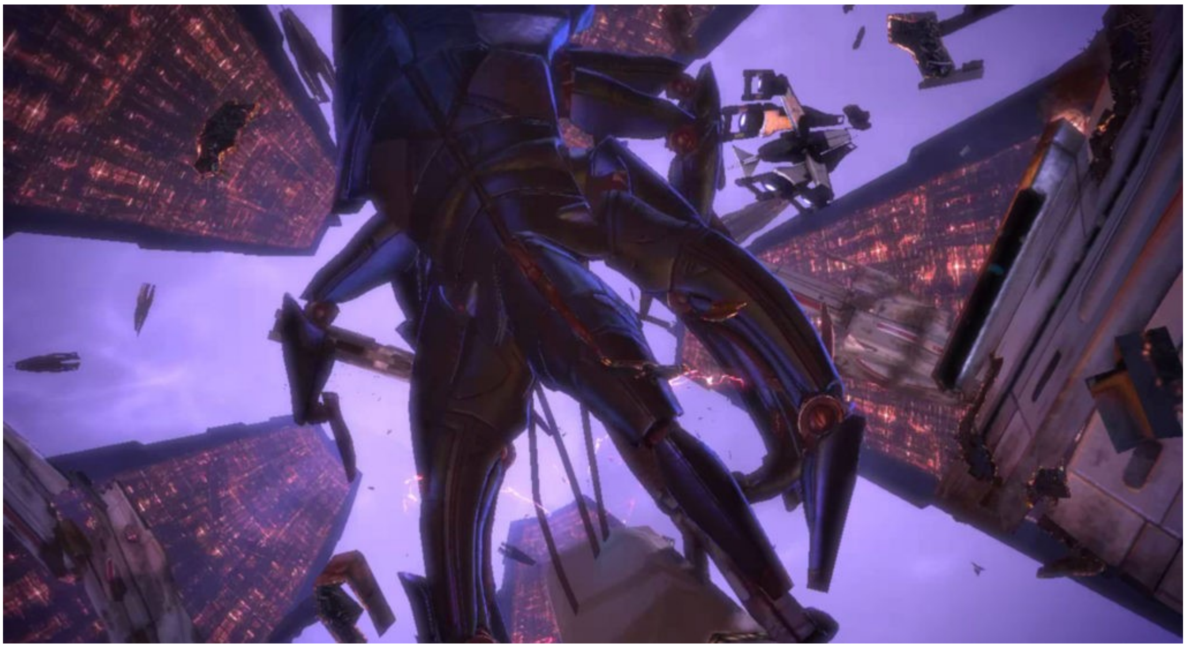
Kirrahe reveals his plan to destroy Saren's base with a nuclear bomb, and Shepard and their squadmates join this mission. Either Kaidan Alenko or Ashley Williams is sent to lead a squad of salarians, while the other positions the bomb for activation. When both are overwhelmed by the geth, the soldier at the bomb activates it early to ensure the base is destroyed, and Shepard only has time to save one of them before the bomb explodes.

Shepard finds Sovereign inside the base. He reveals himself to be a Reaper and

explains how the cycles work, with Reapers staying out of sight for 50,000 years or so before coming to harvest the most advanced organic life.
Saren is convinced that allying himself with Sovereign is the only peaceful solution to this conflict between organics and synthetics, and that more people will be spared this way. Shepard can't make him see reason.

Afterwards, Liara finds where the Conduit is and the Normandy heads to Ilos. Vigil, a Prothean VI, talks to Shepard and explains that the Prothean scientists left Ilos for the Citadel in order to alter the signal the Keepers receive. Saren plans to alter it again and use the Conduit to get inside the Citadel with his geth army.

Shepard has little time to get through the Conduit themselves, but manage to get through, and they find the Citadel under attack. After finding Saren, Shepard resists Saren's attempts to recruit them for the Reapers. Shepard either fights Saren or convinces Saren to resist the Reapers and kill himself, but Sovereign reanimates his corpse for one last stand.



Sovereign attacking the Citadel

The Alliance fleet tries to counterattack Sovereign while the Council ship is being attacked by the geth. Shepard has a choice to make: save the Council and risk human lives, or risk the Council to concentrate on Sovereign. No matter what Shepard chooses, Sovereign will die and Saren will be destroyed completely.

Humanity gets a seat on the Council regardless of the Council's survival or death.

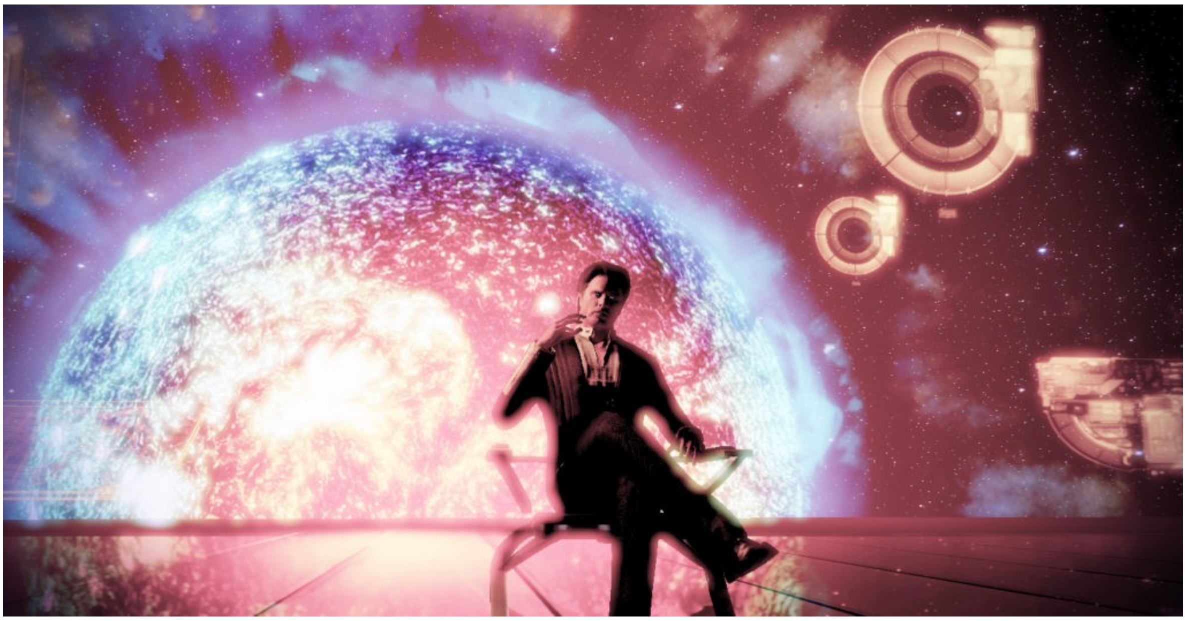
Shepard can pick Ambassador Donnel Udina or Captain David Anderson for the position.

The events of Mass Effect 2

A month after Sovereign's attack on the Citadel, Shepard is sent on a mission to get rid of the remaining geth threat. The Normandy is attacked by an unknown enemy. The crew leaves in escape pods except Joker, the Normandy's pilot. Shepard goes to the cockpit and convinces him to leave. He does, but it's too late for Shepard to find an escape pod. They die suffocating in space.

Two years later, in **2185**, Shepard wakes up on an operating table in Lazarus Station. The station, which is owned by an organization named Cerberus, is under attack. Security mechs have been hacked and are turning against the station's inhabitants. Shepard finds Jacob Taylor and a medical officer named Wilson. Jacob Taylor explains to Shepard that they have been dead for two years and have been revived by the Lazarus Project. Miranda Lawson, under Cerberus orders, worked hard for two years to bring Shepard back to life.

As they're about to find an escape shuttle, Miranda Lawson appears and shoots Wilson, as he was the one who hacked the mechs. Shepard, Miranda and Jacob leave the station.



The Illusive Man

Once safe inside another Cerberus's base, Shepard meets Cerberus's leader: the

Illusive Man. He appears as an hologram and tells Shepard he brought them back because humanity is in danger. Humans in human colonies are disappearing and no one, not even the Alliance, is doing anything about it.

The Illusive Man suggests that Shepard works for them in defeating this new threat and Shepard has no choice but to accept the offer. They're immediately sent to a human colony called Freedom's Progress, where they meet a quarian team led by their old squadmate Tali'Zorah. Shepard discovers that the new threat is called the Collectors. They're a previously unknown species now working for the Reapers. Why they are kidnapping humans, Shepard doesn't know yet.

Normandy SR-2

After the mission on Freedom's Progress, Cerberus gives Shepard a new, larger version of the Normandy. Called the Normandy SR-2, this ship has the same exterior design but a different interior design and an AI called EDI. Joker, the Normandy's pilot, is now working for Cerberus after being grounded by the Alliance.

The main mission is called the "Suicide Mission": Shepard will have to go through the Omega-4 Relay to reach the Collector's base. Shepard must find people to recruit for their team and is given different dossiers from the Illusive Man. With Jacob Taylor and Miranda Lawson, Shepard goes to recruit those squad members.

In the space station Omega, Shepard finds a salarian scientist called Mordin Solus and Garrus Vakarian, their old friend and squadmate, who was going by Archangel on Omega. Jack is a human biotic that Shepard finds on a prison ship called Purgatory. Grunt is a krogan created by a krogan scientist and found in a tank.

New information from the Illusive Man arrives: another colony is under attack. This colony, called Horizon, already has Alliance presence there, in the form of the Virmire Survivor (Ashley Williams or Kaidan Alenko), but they can't stop the Collectors from kidnapping humans. Shepard drives the Collectors away from the colony and then tries to ask the Virmire Survivor back to the Normandy, but the Virmire Survivor refuses. They think Shepard shouldn't work for Cerberus, an organization known by most as a terrorist organization. This concern is shared by many old squadmates, especially Tali'Zorah, even if she is recruited by Shepard and returns to the Normandy.

Thane Krios, a drell assassin, and Samara, an asari Justicar, join Shepard's team. Kasumi Goto, a human master thief, and Zaeed Massani, a human mercenary, can also be acquired by DLC.

Each character Shepard recruits has the potential to become "loyal", increasing their chances of surviving the Suicide Mission. Each mission will reveal something about the squadmates.

The Illusive Man tells Shepard that Cerberus has found a "disabled Collector ship." Shepard goes with their squad and discover that the Collectors have the same genetic material as the Protheans, meaning the Protheans are now the Reapers' slaves. The Collectors are being controlled by Harbinger, the first Reaper. When Shepard finds what they need to get through the Omega-4's relay, the Collectors ambush them, a trap that the Illusive Man was aware of but did not warn Shepard about. Shepard and their squad thankfully escape the encounter.

A new mission sees Shepard and squadmates go inside a derelict Reaper to find an IFF transponder in order to safely go through the Omega-4 relay. During this mission, Shepard finds a geth called Legion that can be recruited. The IFF is put into the Normandy's system. While Shepard is away from the ship, the Normandy is attacked and the crew kidnapped. With EDI's help, Joker is able to retake control of the Normandy.

Last Talk Before Suicide Mission

The Normandy heads to the Omega-4 relay: the final mission of Mass Effect 2 – the Suicide Mission – starts.

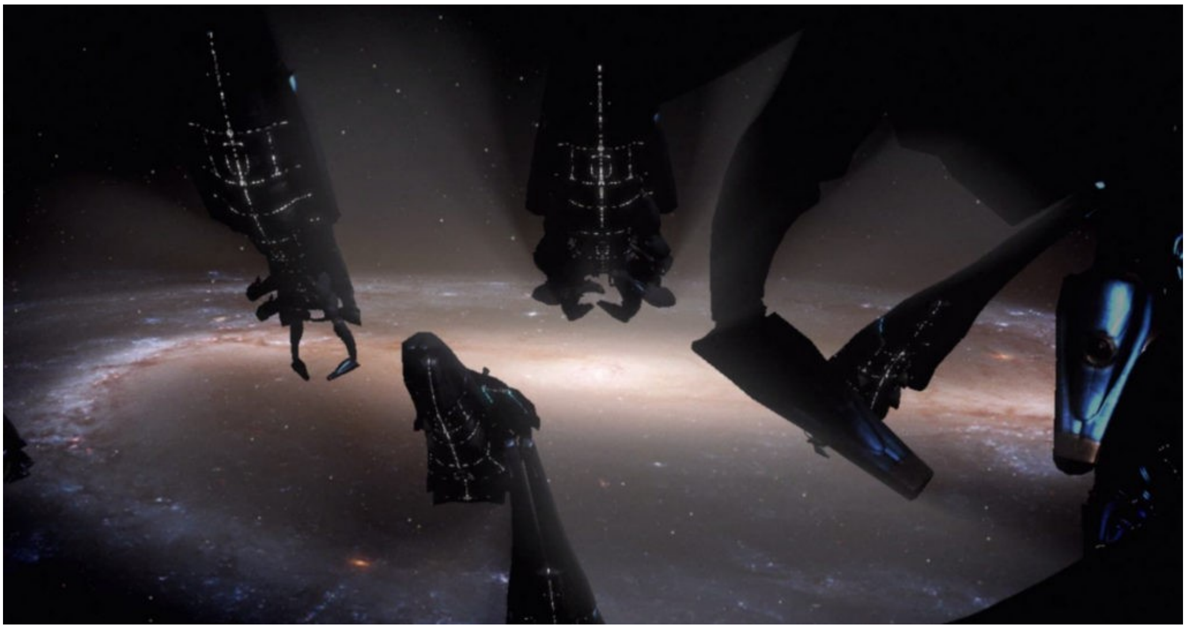
With upgrades made to the ship and with the IFF, they're able to go through and find the Collector Base.

Different decisions are made during this mission. If Shepard doesn't go through the relay as soon as possible, the Normandy crew that has been kidnapped will be found dead. If they leave ASAP, they'll find the crew alive and rescue them. Shepard has to put people in key positions for the mission: not choosing wisely could mean the death of their squadmates. It is possible for Shepard to die during this mission as well.

Shepard fights the Collectors and reaches the central chamber of the base, where they find a giant new Reaper made of the genetic material of the kidnapped humans. The Illusive Man contacts Shepard and argues that it would be better to preserve the Collector base to use against the Reapers than to destroy it. Shepard chooses to save it or not.

The human Reaper awakens to fight Shepard and the team. A bomb will detonate: with enough surviving squadmates, Shepard escapes to the Normandy in time, where Joker gives Shepard the Reaper's schematics. Without enough squadmates, Shepard doesn't make it to the Normandy and dies.

The last image of Mass Effect 2 show the Reapers, awakened, ready to start a new cycle of harvesting.

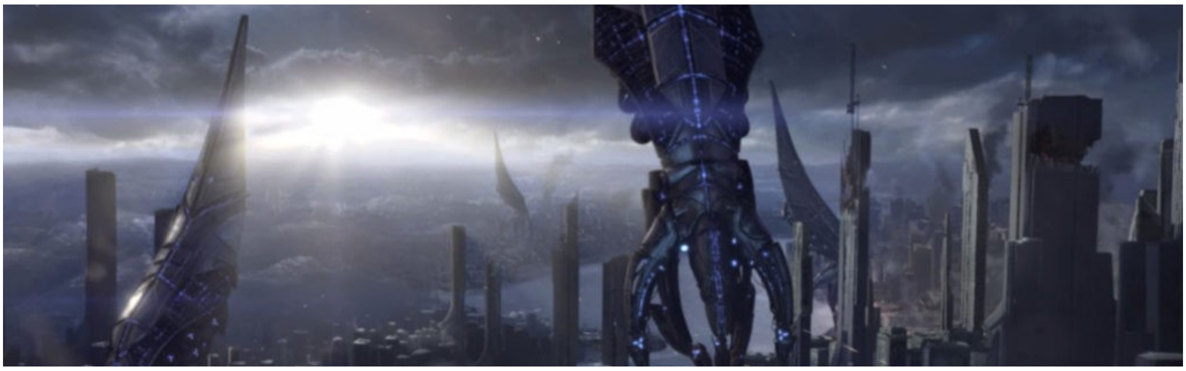


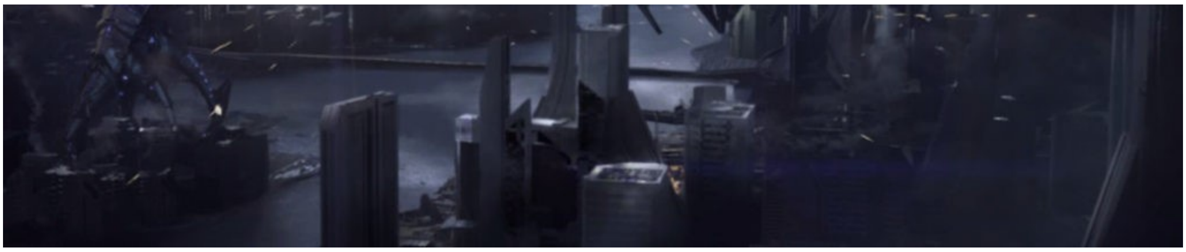
Reapers at the end of ME2

In Arrival, a Mass Effect 2 DLC, Shepard must destroy a mass relay and countless batarian lives to prevent the Reapers from arriving through the Alpha relay.

The events of Mass Effect 3

Shepard has been put in custody following the events of Mass Effect 2, either because they worked for Cerberus or because of their actions in the Arrival DLC. After six months in custody, Shepard begins to answer Alliance Command's questions about their arrival and how to defeat them, only to see the Reapers attack Earth. Earth's defenses are destroyed, and the Reapers start to destroy Earth with converted Reaper creatures. Shepard tries to save a little boy but can't: the boy's escape shuttle explodes.



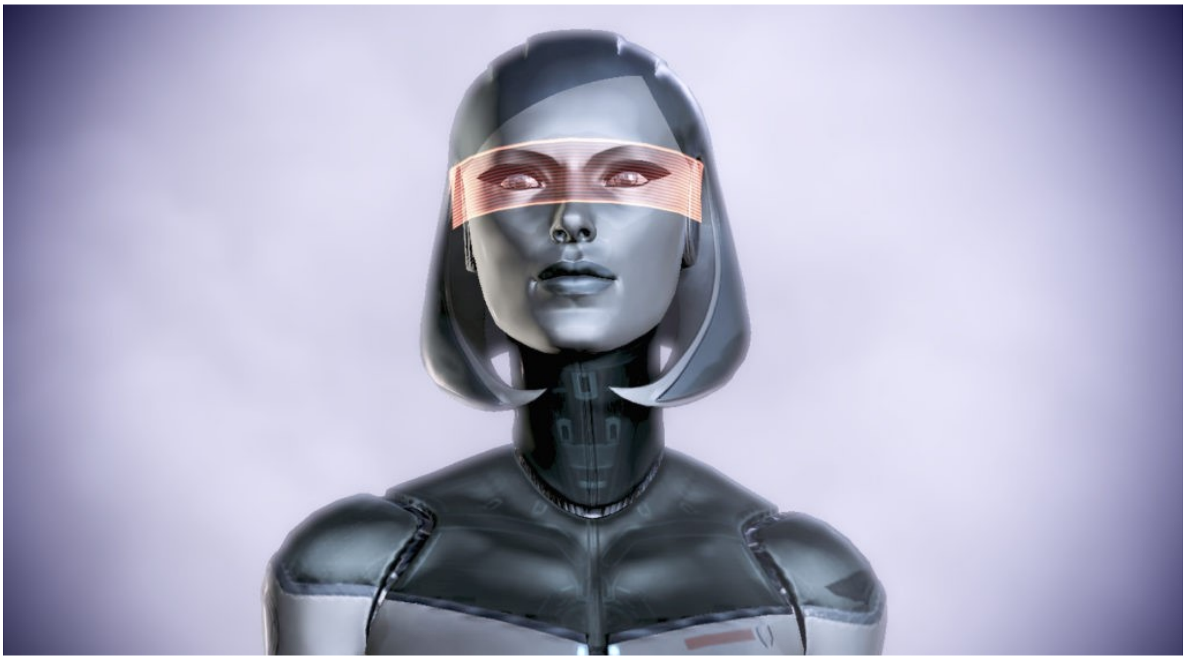


Reapers on Earth

David Anderson stays on Earth and asks Shepard to leave with the Normandy, saying that they'll be more useful finding reinforcements. In the Normandy, Shepard is put in contact with Hackett who asks Shepard to go to Mars, where they might find something that will help them defeat the Reapers and take Earth back.

Shepard's squad is made of the Virmire Survivor (either Kaidan or Ashley) and James Vega, a new character. Joker is still the pilot on board, with EDI as the ship's AI.

On Mars, Shepard finds Liara T'Soni, who has found plans that would allow the creation of a Prothean device that could defeat the Reapers, and is now trying to escape from Cerberus soldiers. They discover that an AI in disguise is there trying to steal the data for Cerberus. The Illusive Man appears as a hologram and explains he wants to take control of the Reapers instead of destroying them. Shepard runs after the AI. With their squad's help, they're able to stop the AI but the Virmire Survivor is injured and has to be taken to an hospital immediately. Later, EDI uses the AI's body as her new platform.



EDI

The Normandy heads to the Citadel. There, Shepard and Liara try to convince the Council to help and show them the plans for this Prothean weapon. The Council refuses to help, as their species are all worried about their own survival. Shepard realizes that in order to take Earth back, they will have to work with each species. Uniting the galaxy is the key to stop the Reapers. Admiral Hackett will supervise and lead the construction of the Prothean device, now being called the Crucible.

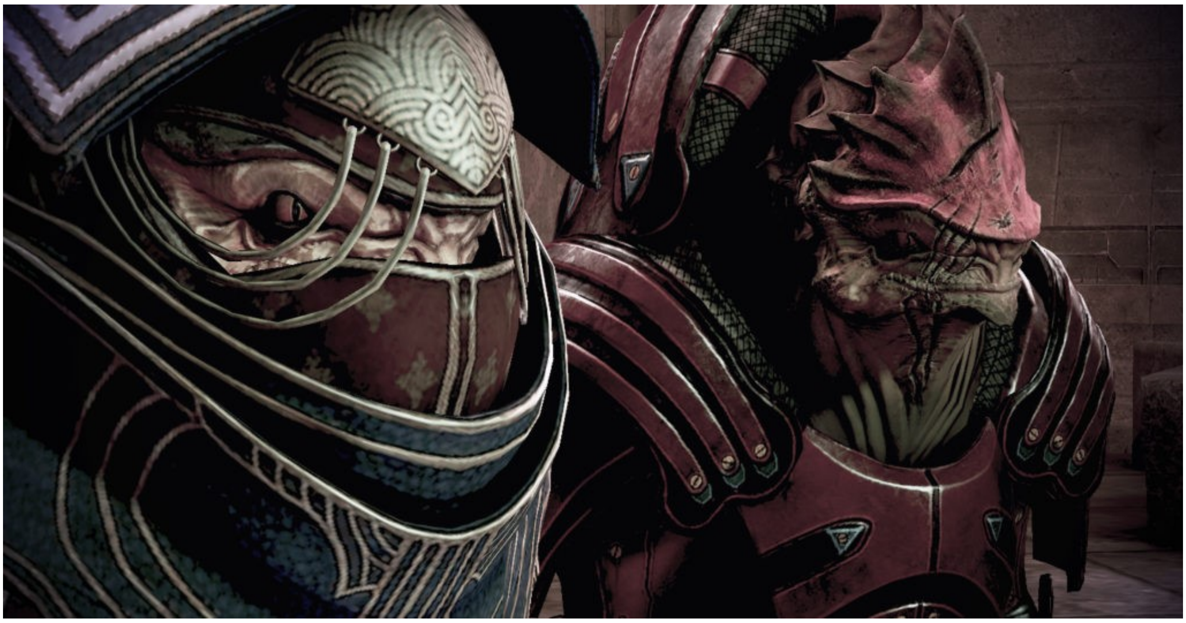
At any point from now until endgame, the opening mission of the Mass Effect DLC called “From Ashes” can be played. This DLC allows Shepard to find the only Prothean survivor: Javik. Javik is awakened and is surprised to find that the Protheans’ warning were not heeded. Shepard explains that no one could understand what was inside the beacon. Javik becomes a squadmate on the Normandy to complete his mission of destroying the Reapers. He will often comment about life in the Prothean empire during their Reaper War. Fellow soldiers were indoctrinated and had to be killed. The war with the Reapers left a profound trace on Javik.

Shepard and Garrus on Palaven’s moon

Shepard go to Palaven’s moon to recruit the turian primarch Adrien Victus. They also recruit Garrus Vakarian. Victus will give Shepard support only if the krogan agree to help Palaven, the turian homeworld, so Shepard holds a summit with the primarch, Urdnot Wrex or Urdnot Wreav (leader of the krogan), and Dalatrass

Linron (leader of the salarians). The krogan leader agrees to help if the genophage is cured. Dalatrass Linron refuses to help cure the genophage, even offering Shepard salarian support in exchange for sabotaging the cure.

The mission on Tuchanka with a salarian doctor (Mordin Solus if he survived the suicide mission, Padok Wiks if not) and Eve, a female krogan female who can help cure the genophage, has different outcomes depending on Shepard's choice. The genophage can be cured, with the salarian doctor dying in the process, or the cure can be sabotaged, with the doctor either shot by Shepard or faking his own death. Either way, the krogan believe the genophage is cured, and support Shepard and help fight the Reapers on Palaven. The Primarch then promises that the turians and their fleet will be there to help Earth when the time comes.



Urdnot Bakara and Urdnot Wrex

After the mission on Tuchanka, Shepard heads to the Citadel where Cerberus is staging a coup. Kai Leng, a Cerberus assassin, tries to kill the salarian councilor. If Thane Krios is alive and in contact with Shepard, he interferes but is badly injured by Kai Leng; if Thane is dead, Major Kirrahe takes the hit and dies instantly; the councilor dies if neither are present.

Shepard tries to save the Citadel Council. They figure out that Donnel Udina, the human councillor, has betrayed them, and is in fact working with Cerberus. The Virmire Survivor, alive and now a Spectre, thinks Shepard is there to kill the Council. Shepard can convince them that Udina is involved or can kill the Virmire

Survivor if they remain unconvinced. Udina is shot no matter what.

If the Survivor is still alive, they join the Normandy again as a squadmate and friend. If Thane Krios saved the salarian councilor, he dies from his injuries.

Next on Shepard's list: meeting the quarians and their flotilla, who have been very discreet recently, as they prepare for a full war with the geth in order to regain control of their homeworld, Rannoch.

The geth were originally created by the quarians as an advanced VI labor force. In the year **2485**, a geth asked its quarian creator if it had a soul. This question made the quarians panic, as they realized the geth were becoming a sentient race. In their panic, the quarians gave order to shut down all geth. This led the geth to rebel. When they were overwhelmed by geth forces, the quarians had to flee Rannoch, and have been living on spaceships in the quarian flotilla ever since.

Shepard is helped by Tali'Zorah if she survived the Suicide Mission, or guided by quarian Admiral Xen if Tali is dead. They board a geth dreadnought broadcasting a Reaper signal in order to destroy it. They also find a kidnapped Legion, if they survived the Suicide Mission, or otherwise a Geth VI, who explains that some geth turned to the Reapers, who are now controlling them in exchange for upgrades. With their geth ally's help, Shepard gets to a Reaper base and destroys a Reaper on Rannoch, the one giving the signal.

However, the quarians and the geth are still at war. Shepard can allow their geth ally to use the Reaper code to upgrade their species to true intelligence, which means the quarians will be killed and become extinct, or stop the Reaper code upload, enabling the quarians to destroy the geth. Another solution is to unite the geth and the quarians. The surviving species will become war assets and help Shepard during the final attack on Earth.

Tali and Legion – Does this unit have a soul?

If Shepard allows the upload, the geth ally will sacrifice themselves to fully upgrade the geth. If the quarian fleets are destroyed, the quarian leader present will kill herself. If Shepard stops the upload, their geth ally will attack and be killed. If peace is made between the quarians and the geth, Tali'Zorah will answer the geth's question and say that yes, this unit has a soul. The answer lies in the question itself.

Afterwards, the asari councilor asks to speak to Shepard. She explains that the asari have hidden a Prothean artifact on their homeworld, Thessia. This artifact could help finish the Crucible and destroy the Reapers. Shepard and their squad arrive on Thessia, which is under Reaper attack. Shepard activates the artifact, freeing a Prothean VI called Vendetta. Vendetta explains that the Crucible needs the "Catalyst" to be effective. Vendetta is about to tell Shepard what the Catalyst is when Kai Leng appears. Vendetta detects reaper indoctrination and stops talking. Kai Leng steals Vendetta, attacks Shepard, and leaves; however, Normandy Comm Specialist Samantha Traynor tracks his shuttle and extrapolates his destination. Shepard escapes Thessia with their squadmates.

After Thessia, Shepard follows Kai Leng to Horizon where a supposed refugee facility called Sanctuary has been conducting research on Reaper creatures for Cerberus. There, Shepard finds either Miranda, who is there to save her sister Oriana from her father, or if Miranda died on the Suicide Mission, Oriana herself, investigating their father's involvement in the facility. The active sister plants a tracker on Kai Leng, allowing Shepard to find Cerberus's base.

With Hackett's help, Shepard assaults the base, kills Kai Leng and finds out that the Citadel is the Catalyst needed to make the Crucible work. They also discover that the Illusive Man is fully indoctrinated. He told the Reapers that the Citadel could activate the Crucible, which makes the Reapers take control of the station and put it above Earth, where most of their fleets are. The Illusive Man is inside the station at the time.

The final assault happens on Earth. With Shepard uniting the different species, the fleets are present to fight the Reapers. A final attack is launched on Earth. Shepard arrives in London, where they find David Anderson and say goodbye to their friends. A beam on Earth connects to the Citadel: Shepard gets there just in time. Anderson is also on board the station, but he has been taken hostage by the Illusive Man. Shepard can shoot him or make him see he's indoctrinated, which will lead to him killing himself. No matter what, Anderson is badly injured. He dies from his injuries, but not before telling Shepard how proud he is of them. The arms of the Citadel are opening, allowing the Crucible to dock.

Meeting the Catalyst

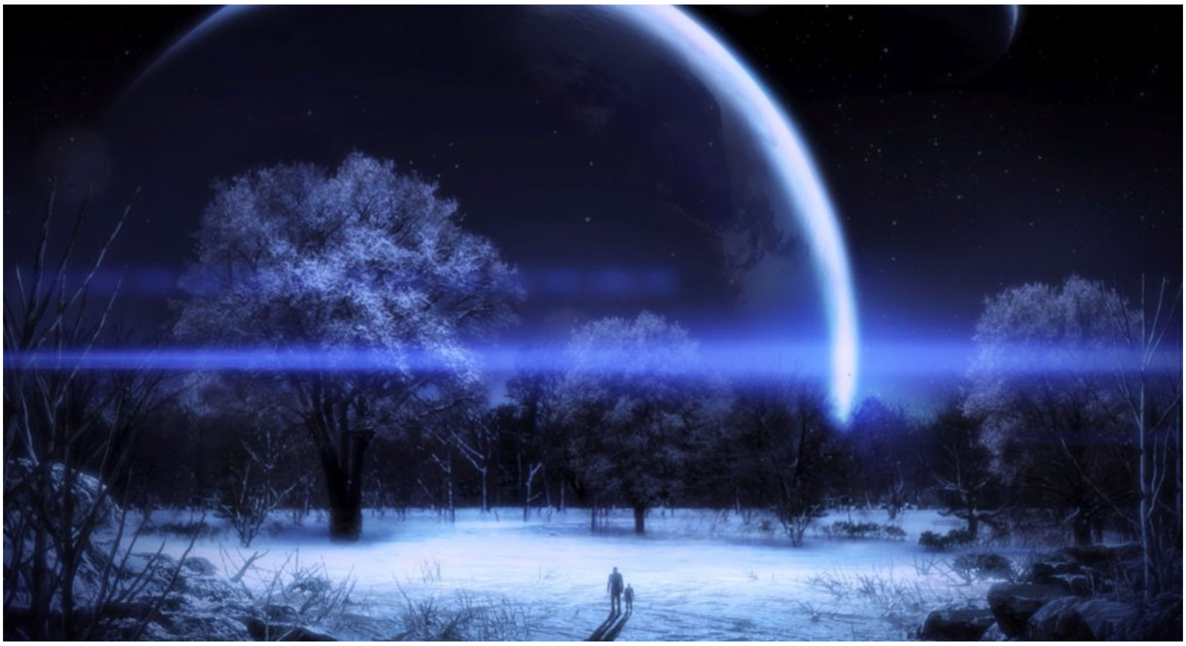
Shepard, still alive, reach the "pinnacle" of the Citadel, where an AI appears. It takes the form of the little boy Shepard couldn't save on Earth and who has been in his nightmares throughout the entire game. This AI is the Intelligence, the Catalyst. It believes that synthetic life will always destroy organic life, and that the cycles of harvesting were the only way to prevent synthetic life from destroying organic life forever. Each cycle allowed the Catalyst to study the evolution of organic life, in order to find a permanent way to deal with the synthetic and organic conflict. In all cycles, no one has managed to get to this point. No one, but Shepard.

The Catalyst suggests three options to Shepard:

- Destroy: all synthetic life will be destroyed, including EDI and, if they survived the war on Rannoch, the geth
- Synthesis: the ending the Catalyst believes to be ideal: synthetic and organic merge and become a new hybrid species
- Control: Shepard takes control of the Reapers

Another possible ending is to refuse those endings, in which case the Reapers win and continue their cycle, but a time capsule Liara made is shown on an unknown planet.

Depending on Shepard's war assets, they might survive the Destroy ending. They're killed in the Synthesis ending. They become the new Catalyst in the Control ending. The Normandy and crew survive the blast from the Crucible, though they're now stranded on an alien planet. The mass relay network is damaged in the Control ending or in all endings with the Extended Cut DLC, or destroyed in the Destroy and Synthesis endings without the Extended Cut.



Stargazer

A final post-credits cutscene shows an old man named Stargazer telling the story of the Shepard to a small boy. This implies that Shepard, and their legacy, will have a long standing impact to the world of Mass Effect.

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